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INTERVIEWING PREPARATION

CDC CAREER DEVELOPMENT CENTER

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How to use this guide

The Career Development Center (CDC) offers this guide to provide an overview of the interview process. Interview success starts before an interview is conducted with effective research, planning and preparation. The guide is organized by the following components:

Before the Interview	✓ Conduct effective preparation including the following areas: 1. Research the organization & interviewer(s) 2. Competitive analysis of yourself 3. Address logistics, dress & etiquette 4. Plan for interview medium & format considerations 5. Conduct topic-specific preparation
During the Interview	✓ Demonstrate enthusiasm for and ability to do the job ✓ Exhibit professionalism and composure during the interview ✓ Convey the planning and preparation undertaken ✓ Tell effective stories
After the Interview	✓ Write thoughtful and timely thank you letters ✓ Follow-up appropriately regarding status of position ✓ Examine areas of strength and places for improvement in your interview preparation and execution

Before the Interview

Before beginning your own research, make sure you know as much as you can about the interview. When an interviewer contacts you to schedule an interview, it's likely they will share relevant details. When you are coordinating the interview time/date, consider inquiring on these aspects. Areas of information to gather:

- Interview location
- Expected duration
- Who you'll be meeting with
- Style or method of interview

Part 1: Research the Organization and the Interviewer(s).

Find out as much as possible about the company's purpose, history, publications, and offerings. Strategies to research organizations include:

- Review organization website and all organization social media platforms
- Follow organization on LinkedIn
- Google search
- Google News search
- Academic literature review search
- Use VAULT Career Insider (accessible via MC2)
- Field/Industry-specific publications
- Informational Interviews

If possible, arrange an informational interview with someone who works or has worked in the organization. An informational interview is a interview undertaken purely for informational purposes. See the CDC's **Guide to Informational Interviewing** to learn more. Similarly, try to get a sense of with whom you will be speaking. Strategies to research interviewer(s) include:

- Google interviewer(s)
- Follow them on social media platforms
- Look up their profile(s) on LinkedIn
- Conduct academic literature review search with their name(s)

Before the Interview
Part 2: Competitive Analysis of Yourself

Based on what you know about the position and the company, list the traits and skills that are needed for the job, as well as ways that the organization's mission relates to your interests and goals. Identify examples of activities or work experience where you demonstrated the necessary qualifications. Use the CDC's **Key Career Skills Workbook** to learn how to connect these examples into effective stories.

If you have yet to do so, make sure your online presence is appropriate for employers. Job seekers need to identify how to use social media as promotional tools for their job search versus solely heightening privacy on certain mediums. Create an effective LinkedIn profile that features your academic work and relevant job, internship, and volunteer experiences. Google yourself to see what appears. If possible, delete outdated or inappropriate social media or webpages. Use the CDC's **Guide to Developing a Professional Social Media Presence** and attend one of the CDC's **LinkedIn workshops** for more information.

Brooks (2009) recommends utilizing a SWOT analysis technique to conduct self-analysis as part of interview preparation. Reflect on your individual strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats using the prompts below:

STRENGTHS Relevant skills and experiences that would appeal to the interviewer • What three skills should you highlight? • What makes you a uniquely qualified candidate?	**OPPORTUNITIES** Learning opportunities presented through position & organization • Perceived benefits of position • Congruence with your long-term plans • Growth opportunities
WEAKNESSES Identify factors that may concern an interviewer and prepare strategies to mitigate them • What areas of job description are you least qualified in? • Any issues or concerns an employer may identify (e.g. your need to relocate, start date availability, drug test, background check)?	**THREATS** Identify your competition Identify experiences might they possess prepare strategies to mitigate them • Review job description and identify how other candidates may compare more favorably

As part of interview preparation, candidates should *emphasize strengths and opportunities* while addressing weaknesses and threats. People may avoid addressing their weaknesses or threats directly (unless directly asked to do so), and choose to use that information to effectively prepare.

Brooks, K. (2009). *You Majored in What?.* New York: Plume.

Before the Interview
Part 3: Address Logistics, Dress & Etiquette

Logistics, Dress & Etiquette
Employers perceive an interview as an opportunity to see the most formal and professional version of you. Successful interview preparation includes planning all of the details that contribute to feeling composed and confident. An employment environment may end up being more casual thereafter, but an interview shows your appreciation of, and capacity for formality and professionalism.

Sleep & Diet	• Make sure you are well rested. • Eat as you would normally. Avoid over-caffeinating.
Attire	• Your outfit should be color-coordinated, clean and ironed. Review your apparel at least two days before the interview: check for stains, undone hems, open seams, loose threads or buttons. Dry-clean or launder if necessary. • Research industry standard dress. • Dress better than a typical day at the desired work environment. You may dress more casually depending on company policy when you are hired. • Your qualifications should be memorable, not your attire. • When in doubt, err on the side of being more formal and conservative. • Keep makeup to a minimum. Avoid wearing perfume or cologne. • Your jewelry and hairstyle should be conservative. • Make sure your shoes and socks are appropriate. Avoid white socks. Dress shoes should clean and polished. • Attire including shoes, should be weather and season appropriate.
Transportation	• Make any necessary travel arrangements well in advance for your interview. Double check the location, and address when you make any maps/directions. • Plan travel to ensure that your arrival is at least 15 minutes in advance of the interview. • Try to avoid scheduling anything directly following the interview.
Schedule	• Consider sending an email to interviewer 1-2 days prior to confirm the date, time and location. Express your enthusiasm for the position. • Build in time before the interview for preparation and transportation. • Schedule time after the interview for writing thank you letters, follow-up, and debriefing.
Etiquette	• Be professional while you wait for your appointment. Do not eat or make personal calls. • Convey professional enthusiasm for the organization and the position. • Demonstrate your ability to be gracious and polite. • Be mindful of body language, including eye contact. • Treat everyone as though they are instrumental to your hiring. • Research culture-specific and industry-specific norms.

Before the Interview
Part 4: Medium & Format Considerations

Interview Medium

The method or medium for which the interview is taking place is a critical factor to consider in preparing for your interview.

MEDIUM	OPPORTUNITIES FOR EMPLOYER	CONSIDERATIONS FOR INTERVIEWEE
In-person	• See candidates first-hand • Experience their formal and informal behaviors • Involve several people/departments in interview process	• Utilize the full extent of opportunity to convey your preparation, interest for and ability to do the job • Demonstrate professional conduct and attire • See work environment first-hand
Phone	• Cost and time efficient • Often utilized for 1st round interview to briefly screen larger pool of candidates before choosing a smaller group for 2nd round	• Ensure quiet environment with few/no distractions or interruptions • Make sure your phone has consistent reception with no interference • Convey professional enthusiasm with your voice • Avoid rambling and close responses succinctly • Dress professionally. Your presentation will be more formal. • Allow for pauses in conversation. Don't overthink your response if an interviewer pauses to write notes after you finish speaking.
Video (e.g. Skype, Google+, Facetime)	• Cost and time efficient • Ability to see people and their non-verbal behaviors • Ability to conduct interview live or request candidates to record their responses for your review	• Make sure to plan for time to set-up and test your technology • Your ID, screen name and photo should be professional • The background that they employer sees should be clean, organized and free of distractions • Dress as though you are interviewing in-person

Interview Format

Interview method and types of questions vary greatly. Try to obtain a sense of what the interview will entail and plan your preparation accordingly.

FORMAT	OVERVIEW & STRATEGIES	EXAMPLE QUESTIONS
Traditional	Typical question-answer response. • Be concise. Stick to points that highlight your ability to do the job. • Close responses effectively. • Ask yourself, "What's the employer looking to address with the question?" Tailor your responses to their anticipated needs.	"Tell me about yourself." "Describe your greatest strength and weakness." "Where do you see yourself in 5 years?"
Behavioral	Interviewer requests a specific example and interviewee recounts an example. • Use STAR technique (situation, task, action, result). • Avoid assuming knowledge or giving too much context. • Emphasize outcomes, results and your growth.	"Tell me about a time where you demonstrated your problem-solving skills." "Have you had to address conflict with a coworker? How did you handle it?" "Describe your work at X. What did you do/learn there?" "Walk me through your project for ____." (from your resume)
Situational	Interviewer explains a hypothetical situation and interviewee addresses the steps and considerations to take. • Consider what skills this scenario requires and emphasize strategies to use that skill. • Use a wide angle lens. Avoid minutiae and focus on broad strategies. • Emphasize qualitative skills including communication, collaboration, consultation, planning and problem-solving. • Demonstrate an ability to forecast potential issues and how you would address concerns.	"You have to troubleshoot product issues over the phone. What are considerations you would incorporate in phone consultations with customers?" "A parent calls to inquire about a child's performance in your class. Describe how you would handle this conversation." "You have to represent this department at larger organization functions. How would you handle this responsibility?"

Case	Two-way dialogue where interviewer offers a specific business or strategic situation. Interviewee can ask clarifying questions to understand nature of situation, and then propose solutions or responses to the interviewer's particular prompts. • Review organization's tutorials on their case interviewing philosophy. • Make sure you have understood the case fully. Ask clarifying questions. • Briefly compose and organize your thoughts and analysis. • Focus your responses on the question(s) asked. • Show your analysis skills and techniques but don't make the math overly complex. Talk through your calculations so they understand your thought process. • Demonstrate your communication and presentation skills in composing thoughtful, creative and insightful responses.	Please see a CDC counselor to receive tailored case interview samples and preparation. Recommended resources: • **Make sure to attend the employer's on-campus presentations!** • Case in Point by Marc Consentino • Ace your Case! by WetFeet as a good preliminary resource. • Consulting firm web sites also offer organization-specific preparation resources. • VAULT Career Insider (accessible via MC2) Consulting industry overview
Test/Assessment	Interviewer requests that interviewee complete a test/assessment. Often assessments are used to demonstrate a specific skill set like quantitative analysis methods, or a software competency.	• Tests/assessments range dramatically.

Before the Interview
Part 5: Conduct topic-specific preparation

Identify essential skills in the job description
Employers take great care in crafting job descriptions, along with essential and desired qualifications with the intent to give candidates a clear roadmap of what skills to highlight in applications and interviews. Review the job description and qualifications with care. Use the **CDC Key Career Skills Workbook** as a tool to develop stories to demonstrate each skill.

Practice Interviewing Questions.
Anticipate possible questions that you may be asked during the interview. **Spotlight on Careers** is a great resource for field-specific interviewing suggestions. Practice your responses so that you sound confident during your interview, but not rehearsed. If possible, schedule a mock interview with a career counselor to identify strengths and areas for improvement.

Commonly Asked Questions

COMMON QUESTION	STRATEGIES
Tell me about yourself.	Inherent in this question is the opportunity to tell them why you're applying. Answer in about two minutes. Avoid extensive details. Your answer should focus on information *pertinent* to the position, such as skills and accomplishments. Touch on education, activities, work experience, career interests, and long-term goals.
What do you consider to be your greatest weakness?	There are three ways to approach this question: 1. If you lack experience with a particular aspect of the job—and you're confident you can learn the task quickly—use that as an example. Describe how you've quickly learned a similar skill in the past. 2. Identify a former weakness and describe how you overcame it. Relate this back to the position and work. 3. Avoid using general, overly used statements like, "I take on too much work" or "I'm a perfectionist". Whichever you choose, be sure to relate your answer to the job, demonstrate that you're motivated to succeed, and describe how you've worked with or overcome a problem in the past.
Where do you see yourself in 5 years?	Employers want to see that you are thinking about the future. Describe how the position you're applying for contributes to your plans.
How do you determine or evaluate success?	Your response demonstrates the way you gauge your own performance, and the work of others.
What are three words a friend would use to describe you?	This shows you want others to perceive you, and characteristics you deem most important. Stick to qualities that are important in a work environment (e.g. thoughtful, compassionate, or considerate,).
Why should we hire you?	This is where you should really highlight your strengths. Demonstrate areas from your background that relate to the company's needs. Recap the interviewer's description of the job, matching it with your skills.

Behavioral-Based Interviewing (BBI) Techniques

BBI encourages applicants to describe situations in which they have utilized skills and abilities similar to those required by the job. The BBI approach is based on the premise that past performance is the best predictor of future performance. The interviewer asks questions targeted at the behavior, asking the candidate about particular situations or experiences that s/he has had. Candidates, in turn, offer behavioral examples from almost any life experience—current or previous employment, internships, volunteer activities, or class projects.

Success in BBI depends upon two components:

1. Articulate **examples** that best illustrate what you can do for an employer.

2. *Tell stories effectively*. Candidates must identify the problem or tasks, for which they are responsible, tell what they did, and the results.

Before your interview, identify a series of significant events in your life that demonstrate qualities such as problem solving, conflict management, and the others listed in the "Common BBI Questions" section. Prepare the beginning, middle, and end of each in the following format. Use the STAR technique to build effective examples.

Situation/Task---What was the situation that you faced?

Action---Specifically what did you do or say to address the situation?

Result---What was the impact of your efforts? What did you learn?

Tips for BBI Success:

- *Give enough appropriate context for a non-involved party to understand the situation, behavior and results*. Don't assume knowledge but also don't bore them with too many details.
- *Stay positive*. Blaming others or explaining a negative situation can reflect poorly on you.
- *Stay on message*. Practice the key points of your story that hit on your skills and relevant experiences.
- *Hit it home*. End with a summary of the results both for the organization and for you.

Common Behavior-Based Interview Questions

Problem Solving	• When was the last time you solved a difficult problem? • How did you go about analyzing the problem? • What alternative solutions did you consider? • How did you implement your solution? • What was the outcome?
Handling Details	• Tell me about the most significant project you have worked on in which it was crucial to keep track of details while still managing the "big picture." • What was the project? What skills did you use in managing it? • How did you keep focused on the overall goal of the project while still managing all of the specific parts?
Oral Communication	• Describe a time when you had great difficulty communicating your thoughts clearly to another person or group. • What was the situation? • What message were you trying to convey? • What did you do to get your point across more clearly? • What was the outcome?
Conflict Management	• Tell me about a time when you voiced a concern or disagreement to a co-worker or supervisor. • Where did the disagreement originate? • What did you say to the other person? What was his/her reaction? • What was the outcome of the disagreement?
Initiative	• Describe the best example of taking the initiative to do something that needed to be done, even though it wasn't your responsibility. • What circumstances required you to act? • What actions did you take? What impact did your initiative have?
Managing Stress	• Describe your most disappointing experience. • How did you cope with it? • What did you do to move beyond it?

During the Interview

Be Mindful of Your Body Language

- Shake hands firmly when introduced and maintain eye contact.
- Project enthusiasm, flexibility, ease of communication, a sense of humor when appropriate, and willingness for hard work.
- Learn the names of all the people with whom you will interview. Refer to the interviewer by the correct title, Dr., Mr., or Ms. Do not use Mrs.
- Remember that an employer's first impression is often a deciding factor.

Listen Carefully to Each Question

- When answering questions, pause in order to give you time to compose an answer that is concise but thoughtful.
- Politely ask clarification for questions which seem unclear.

Answer Questions in Terms of Your Skills and Accomplishments

- Focus your responses on previous experiences that relate to the employer's needs.
- Talk about time off if there has been a considerable lapse of time between jobs.
- Avoid general statements.

Speak in Positive Terms

- Never speak negatively about former employers or co-workers.

Avoid Questions about Salary and Benefits

- These questions are better left for after you have been offered the position.
- If the interviewer asks these questions, postpone discussing it or speak in terms of salary range—offering a five-thousand dollar range for salaried positions is acceptable. Be sure to conduct research regarding realistic salaries using the Bureau of Labor Statistics' Occupational Outlook Handbook or NACE's Salary Calculator.

Ask for a Timeline Regarding the Hiring Process

- If you have not received a response by the scheduled decision date, you may call to check on the progress. Do not call too soon or too often.

Close the Interview with a Summary Statement

- This statement allows you the opportunity to reiterate the skills you have to offer and to reaffirm your interest in the position.
- Express your enthusiasm. Ask the person that interviewed you for a business card. This ensures that you will have correct information regarding the interviewer's name, title, company name, and address.

Prepare Questions to Ask the Employer

- Prepare at least three questions to ask during the interview.
- These questions should demonstrate your company research. During your interview, pay close attention to the interviewer to avoid asking about topics that he/she already covered.

Bring Extra Copies of Your Resume

- Bringing extra copies allows you the opportunity to reference it during the interview. In the event that the employer misplaces your resume, you can provide an extra copy.

Your Questions for the Interviewer

Develop questions that are based on your research of the company and position. Employers consider this a benchmark of interest and preparation. These questions can distinguish you as a candidate that is thorough, well prepared and genuinely interested in this particular job. Keep your questions about the company brief and general, but do not ask for information that is easily obtained from the company's website.

Useful sample questions are listed below. However, be creative in developing some questions that are specific to the position and industry. The questions should enhance your understanding of the employer, the personnel, the job, and future opportunities. *Remember that questions relating to salary and employee benefits should be avoided until a firm offer is in place. Adapted from Getting Hired by Edward J. Rodgers, Corporate Vice President and Director of Personnel, N.W.Ayers-Copyright 1982, Prentice-Hall, Inc.*

THE ORGANIZATION

- Could you share more about your work at the organization?

THE POSITION

- What are the characteristics of a successful person in this position?
- What is the most challenging aspect of the work?
- Please describe the details of a typical day for this position.
- Could you share an estimated timeline for this (hiring) process after today?

YOUR DEVELOPMENT

- What kinds of professional development opportunities exist in this role?
- What have other individuals in this role gone on to do at this organization?

Know your Rights: Illegal Interview Questions

In the United States, state and federal law prohibit employers from discriminating against candidates based on protected categories. Federal law protects job seekers from "unfair treatment because of **race**, **color**, **religion**, **sex (including pregnancy)**, **national origin**, **age** (40 or older), **disability** or **genetic information**." (EEOC). States have also created laws to protect additional categories including sexual orientation and gender identity. As of July 2014, 18 states and the District of Columbia protected individuals from discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity, whereas three states protect only on the basis of sexual orientation. The Human Rights Campaign is a great resource for information on the most up-to-date laws. Adapted from the National Association of Employers (NACE), the following information highlights illegal/legal questions posed by employers (NACE, Hlavac and Easterly, Feb. 2014) as part of an application process. Candidates should be mindful of areas of employment law, and also strategize on tactful ways to address potential questions. **Speak with a CDC counselor to discuss any concerns or questions.**

Area	Illegal Questions	Legal Questions
Age	• May not require an applicant's age, date of birth, or for records to prove applicant age. • Year of graduation from high school.	• An employer may ask if an individual meets the minimum age requirements set by law. "Are you over the age of 18?" is an appropriate question.
National Origin/Citizenship	• Are you a U.S. citizen? • Where were you/your parents born? • What is your "native" language?	• Are you authorized to work in the United States?
Race	• All questions related to a person's race will be deemed illegal under federal and state laws.	• None.
Religion	• Any question about a person's religious beliefs, denomination, or any questions that indicate religious customs or holidays.	• After an individual is hired, an employer may inquire about religious accommodations.
Marital/Family Status	• Are you married? • With whom do you live? • Do you plan to have a family? • What are your child-care arrangements?	• Would you be willing to relocate if necessary? Would you be willing to work overtime as necessary?
Personal	• How tall are you? What is your weight?	• Are you able to lift 50-pound weight and carry it 100 yards, as part of the job?
Disability	• Do you have any disabilities? • Please complete the following medical history. • How's your family's health?	• Are you able to perform the essential job functions? Can you demonstrate how you would perform the essential job functions?
Arrest Record	• Have you ever been arrested?	• Have you ever been convicted of _____?
Military	• If you've been in the military, were you honorably discharged?	• In what branch of the Armed Services did you serve? What type of training or education did you receive in the military?

After the Interview

The CDC recommends that job seekers conduct the following steps after interviews.

Write thoughtful and timely thank you letters.

It is expected and commonplace for job seekers to send a thank you letter to an employer following the interview. The CDC recommends that you send thank you letters within 24 hours of the interview. Send email thank you notes the same day of the interview. Make sure to tailor your message to each person you met with as part of your interview process. *Refer to the CDC Guide on Writing Thank You Letters for examples, formatting and structural content.*

Follow-up appropriately regarding status of position.

Candidates should leave an interview with a solid understanding of the employer's timeline moving forward in the hiring process. If an employer explains that they hope to get back to candidates on Monday, and you have not heard by the following Monday, it is appropriate to inquire and reiterate your interest. Make sure to do so in a way that conveys your interest in the position, along with your politeness and understanding. The CDC generally recommends following up no more frequently than once per week regarding a position. *Please discuss your individual questions and concerns with a counselor.*

Examine strengths and areas for improvement in your interview preparation and execution.

Job seekers can analyze interview preparation and performance to continually improve. Review and write down questions that you believe went well, and those that were perhaps more challenging. Identify questions that surprised you. This information can be useful to add to your preparation moving forward.

Notes:

Next Steps:

Highlighted CDC Services	Complimentary CDC Guides
Career Counseling Appointments for: • Clarify strengths & interests • Discuss potential career plans • Review resume • Plan job search strategies • Interview prep **Networking & Personal Branding:** • Tools to Access Mac Alumni • Social Media Inventory • LinkedIn Profile Review	• Resume & C.V. Guide • Writing Professional Letters • Key Career Skills Workbook • Informational Interviewing • Developing a Professional Online Presence **All guides are available for download on the CDC Web site.**

Need help? Questions?
- Scheduled 30- or 60-min. appointments
- Drop-in Appts: M-F: 2-4pm
- Appointments in person, phone & Skype.

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